

Karen Kornbluh, Ambassador of Women

Portrait of Karen Kornbluh, United States Ambassador to the OECD



Karen Kornbluh

Photo DR

Summary

- [Home](#)
- [Five women out of thirty-four ambassadors](#)

Karen Kornbluh, 48, is the U.S. Ambassador to the OECD since 2009. She is at the origin of The Gender Initiative, which aims to help the thirty-four member countries reconcile private and professional spheres. To mark the 50th anniversary of the organization, a portrait of the woman dubbed "Obama's brain."

On the screen of her computer, in her cozy office on Raphael Avenue, is a popular slender silhouette. Barack Obama, smiling, has his arms firmly wrapped around Karen Kornbluh's shoulders. "I love this picture, I just received it!" said the Ambassador. But Karen Kornbluh is far from being a simple groupie. Her role as advisor to the current U.S. President before and during his 2008 campaign has even earned her the nickname of "Obama's Brain." A qualifier that this elegant New Yorker of 48 years, exiled in Paris, denies in a roar of laughter: "Barack Obama has his own brain and it works perfectly!" "Karen Kornbluh wrote the program for the Democratic Platform in 2008. "We had a completely new approach. We encouraged Americans to come together in their living rooms, churches ... They sent us their notes via the internet and we wrote the platform taking into account their thoughts," she recalls.

However, when she was little, Karen Kornbluh wanted to work in front of a blackboard rather than in political circles: "I would have loved to become a teacher. To write with chalk ... or to be the chief.

Before working for Obama, Karen Kornbluh was Deputy Chief of Staff at the Treasury Department. There, she became aware of the obstacles that awaited women, especially if they decide to work and be mothers: "It was just after the birth of my first child. I left the office at 6:30 pm, but it was already too late to enjoy my baby. All important meetings were held at 8pm or 9pm..."

"I felt like I was failing both on the work front and home front." She summarizes in one sentence: "In these environments, women have to 'work like a man.' And it's not right."

When she left the Treasury, Karen Kornbluh began to write about the inequalities for many American women who juggle between children and careers. She published and quickly became a recognized expert in the field. Even inspired Obama, who mentions her in one chapter of his book *The Audacity of Hope*, published in 2007.

Five women out of thirty-four ambassadors.



She is named U.S. Ambassador to the OECD in 2009. This gave her an opportunity to share her thoughts on a broader scale. Karen Kornbluh leads the MENA initiative, which aims to help women in the Middle East in the development of their businesses and their networks. As a foundation: the leading role example that these women give to their daughters. "Women are a resource that has not properly been tapped into worldwide!" she laments.

In the process, earlier this year, she launched and oversees The Gender Initiative – a project in which the U.S. injected \$400,000. It will identify what each member country of the OECD proposes to better reconcile family life of working parents and their professional lives. "We will develop a toolbox that every country, every company can draw from," said Karen Kornbluh. The first results of this study will be presented this week during the ceremonies for the 50th anniversary of the OECD, in the presence of Angela Merkel and Hillary Clinton.

Of the thirty-four ambassadors to the OECD, only five are women. "Once the initiative was put in place, everyone was very receptive," says Karen Kornbluh. "But perhaps we should have a woman who heads such a project after all. "

Karen Kornbluh believes that we must simplify access to part-time, recalling that when she worked for him, Barack Obama had helped to arrange her schedule according to her family." Today, the situation is not just for mothers who lack job opportunities. But it is not fair for fathers who can not spend enough time with their children. It is very important to involve men in these changes," she notes. For example she teaches the sharing of tasks to her two sons: "They remove their plates and do their dishes! "

Karen Kornbluh is an influential ally and sensitive to the cause of women. When asked if she would have preferred to be born as a man, she replied playfully: "It would not have been as fun! "